



# NEWS

*from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*

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## **SERVICE TO REOPEN COMMENT PERIOD ON CHEETAH RECLASSIFICATION**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is reopening the comment period on the petition to reclassify Namibia's cheetah population from endangered to threatened under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. This is the largest remaining population of the species in the world, numbering some 2,500 to 3,000 cats out of the worldwide total of about 9,000 to 12,000.

Since the closing of an earlier comment period last year, the Service has received two new documents containing data that may have major relevance to this action. The first is a new cheetah management plan prepared by the government of Namibia; the second is the final report from a cheetah workshop conducted by the World Conservation Union's (IUCN) Conservation Breeding Specialist Group. The new comment period will allow that information plus any other new data to be considered in the decision.

The cheetah is a large spotted cat that once roamed over most of Africa and southwestern Asia. Today, it has nearly disappeared in Asia and has declined substantially in Africa because of hunting for its attractive skin, conflict with human agricultural interests, habitat loss, and possible deterioration of genetic viability. It was classified as endangered in 1972.

The new comment period opens immediately after the notice is published in the December 9, 1997, Federal Register and will close February 1, 1998. Copies of the two cited documents will be available upon request. The Service will consider all comments and information in making its final decision on whether or not to reclassify the Namibian cheetah population.

Comments, information, and questions should be submitted to Dr. Charles W. Dane, Chief, Office of Scientific Authority, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 North Fairfax Drive, room 750, Arlington, VA 22203; Fax number: 703-358-2276.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages 511 national wildlife refuges covering 92 million acres, as well as 67 national fish hatcheries. It also enforces Federal wildlife laws, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat, administers the Endangered Species Act, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts.

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